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SUBJECT: DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER DISCUSSES PM'S VISIT, HUMAN RIGHTS CASES AND GVN'S FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION, HIV/AIDS AND TIP WITH AMBASSADOR

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Summary

¶1. (SBU) On April 29, Deputy Prime Minister and Politburo member Truong Vinh Trong discussed with the Ambassador Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung's planned visit to the United States, the cases of political dissidents Le Thi Cong Nhan and Bui Kim Thanh and Government of Vietnam (GVN) efforts against trafficking in persons (TIP), corruption and HIV-AIDS. In a meeting lasting over an hour, Trong said the PM's advisers are mulling over a possible meeting for the PM with Vietnamese Americans. He also said that the GVN "is ready to consider" the cases of Nhan and Thanh, but that the GVN must proceed according to its laws. The National Anti-Corruption Steering Committee has studied the efforts of other countries, including the United States, in fighting corruption. The GVN would like the USG to direct its anti-corruption assistance to the Ministry of Justice and Government Inspectorate. The DPM discussed USG HIV/AIDS assistance, expressing a preference to have funds channeled through the Ministry of Health rather than provincial governments. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) After expressing his regret at not meeting the Ambassador sooner, the DPM opened the April 29 meeting by noting how high-level exchanges over the past three years show how far the U.S.-Vietnam relationship has come. The Vietnamese people are "peace-loving" and have put the past behind them, he said. When President Bush visited Vietnam in November 2006, he saw and heard first hand how the Vietnamese people are focused on the future and want deeper U.S.-Vietnam relations, Trong added. The DPM said he sees no point, from his personal perspective, in dwelling on the many scars he has as a result of his Army war service.

¶3. (SBU) Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung's planned visit to the United States will push the U.S.-Vietnam relationship to an even higher level, Trong continued. He asked that the USG give the PM's delegation the same level of protection the GVN provided for President Bush when the President was in Vietnam in 2006. (Note: When PM Phan Van Khai and his delegation were entering a Washington hotel for a luncheon meeting in 2005, a bystander reached out and punched a member of Khai's entourage. End Note.) The DPM said the PM's advisers are considering a meeting for the PM with Vietnamese Americans. In response, the Ambassador said the PM will be looked after well and noted that President Nguyen Minh Triet's 2007 meeting in California with the Vietnamese-Americans community went very well and expressed his expectation that having the PM follow-up President Triet's successful meeting with another such session would prove constructive.

¶4. (SBU) The Ambassador appealed for the GVN to release political prisoners Le Thi Cong Nhan and Bui Kim Thanh. (Note: At the end of the meeting, the Ambassador left a letter requesting the two individuals be released. End Note.) The DPM responded that the GVN "is ready to consider" the two cases, but that the final decision on amnesties rests with the President. "I also hope that we can

improve relations by settling these types of issues, but please understand the GVN must proceed in line with its laws," he said.

Anti-Corruption Focus

¶5. (SBU) The GVN remains resolute in the fight against corruption, the DPM said, because Hanoi realizes that corruption negatively impacts the investment climate. The National Anti-Corruption Steering Committee, which Trong sits on, has studied the efforts of other countries, including the United States, in battling corruption, the DPM added. He thanked the Ambassador for the offer of USG assistance to fight corruption, and asked that it be directed to the Ministry of Justice and Government Inspectorate. The Ambassador responded that the Embassy has begun to reach out to representatives of these two bodies in examining how we might help. The Ambassador also expressed USG support for GVN administrative reform efforts under Project 30 and said the USG stands ready to work with the GVN on strengthening the independence of Vietnam's courts and in training lawyers and judges. The DPM replied that he had just left a two-hour discussion with President Triet on improving the qualifications of Vietnam's lawyers and judges to meet with the Ambassador.

Fighting HIV/AIDS

¶6. (SBU) As Chairman of the GVN Committee on Drug Control and HIV/AIDS, Trong asked that the Ambassador relay to the American people the GVN's gratitude for U.S. financial assistance to fight the spread of HIV/AIDS. Trong pointed out that he has demonstrated his personal commitment to this issue by attending workshops around Vietnam on HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment.

¶7. (SBU) The DPM asked that the USG funnel its HIV/AIDS assistance

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through the Ministry of Health (MOH) rather than provincial governments. The Ambassador responded that they should discuss in more detail how HIV/AIDS funds should be channeled at the upcoming Consultative Group meeting in Sapa, which the DPM and Ambassador will attend. The Ambassador also said the GVN's recent opening of a methadone clinic in Haiphong "is a real milestone" and appealed for the GVN to develop rapid HIV/AIDS testing strategies for hard-to-reach populations.

TIP

¶8. (SBU) The DPM said trafficking in persons (TIP) is an "unhappy subject" for the Vietnamese people. The GVN is trying to ensure that there are sufficient jobs for its growing population, he added. The GVN understands the serious nature of the TIP issue and as such has implemented anti-TIP programs, the DPM said adding that he has personally given instructions for the handling of "big TIP cases." GVN teams have been assigned for months in certain areas of Vietnam to find who is behind trafficking rings, Trong emphasized.

Comment: Seeking More Regular Interactions

¶9. (SBU) DPM Trong expressed a willingness to meet with the Ambassador on a more regular basis, something we plan to pursue, as Trong has oversight over many issues that are of interest to the USG. On the Nhan and Thanh cases, it is probable that, because of their politically sensitive nature, any decision to release them will be made via a consensus at Vietnam's top levels.

¶10. (SBU) Trong's request that HIV/AIDS assistance be funneled exclusively through the Ministry of Health is problematic. USG assistance to the Ministry of Health continues to grow, from USD 4.5 million in FY 2004 to USD 24.3 million in FY 2008. At the same time, other funds go to other GVN ministries and some directly to Ho Chi Minh City; donor governments and technical agencies agree that funding for HIV/AIDS must be spread throughout many sectors beyond health. Moreover, some have concerns about the capacity of MOH and

other ministries in effectively using large sums of money. End comment.

Biographic Notes

¶11. (SBU) DPM Trong has served on the 14-member Politburo since the 2001 9th Party Congress. In his current portfolio, he supervises the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), the GVN's Anti-Corruption and Anti-Trafficking-in-Persons Steering Committees and the Government Inspectorate. The MOJ has been a critical interlocutor for STAR, helping to coordinate technical assistance with various ministries. Trong's portfolio also includes oversight of GVN efforts to prevent and suppress criminal activity, promote judicial reform, and prevent and combat the spread of HIV/AIDS. Trong took an active role in the 2007 land dispute issue in HCMC, blaming both protesters and government officials.

¶12. (SBU) DPM Trong was born in 1942 in Ben Tre province. He holds a Bachelor's of Arts Degree in literature and economic management. He was elected Deputy Prime Minister in June, 2006. Prior to that, he was head of the Party's Internal Affairs Commission (which has since been folded into the Office of the Central Committee).

MICHALAK